HOW TO ...

Find a leak in my inflatable boat, RIB, dinghy, life raft or inflatable kayak collar or tubes

It can be so frustrating when your inflatable boat or dinghy just will not hold air or maintain air pressure. You think you have a leak or puncture in your inflation collar or tube, or perhaps your inflatable boat valve is leaking air. Either way you need to find the source of the leak or puncture and get your inflatable boat, RIB, dinghy, inflatable kayak or life raft back on the water. This is how the professionals find leaks or punctures:

Inflate your inflatable collar or tubes to maximum working pressure (see your owner's manual) or so that when tapped with the flat of your hand they sound like a drum.

Carefully inspect all areas of the inflatable collar or tubes, including the inflatable keel (if present) for any obvious signs of fabric wear.

Inspect all inflation valves by removing the caps and ensuring that the rubber diaphragms are correctly seated and there is no *obvious* sign of air leakage through the valves, replace the caps tightly. Correctly seated valve diaphragms often leak minor amounts of air, the valve cap is designed to be used as a secondary seal and should always be in place for optimum valve performance. See https://www.ribstore.co.uk/advice/advice-and-information for help and advice on how to repair or replace a boat valve or fit a new valve diaphragm.

Using a plastic spray bottle (you can use an old detergent spray application bottle but ensure that the bottle is thoroughly rinsed-out first), mix mild/neutral Ph washing-up liquid with warm water in equal proportions.

Spray the soap solution over one section of the inflatable boat collars or tubes at a time, including the tube seams, closely inspecting all areas of the sprayed inflatable boat tube before moving onto the next section. Bubbles forming will show where any leaks are evident. Using a chinagraph pencil or waterproof marker, mark each leak on the inflatable collar to highlight the exact position of the leak.

Spray the soap solution over all the previously inspected, and tightly capped, inflation valves (and over-pressure relief valves, if present). Again, small bubbles will form if there is a leak in the inflatable boat valve. Inspect the source of the bubbles to see if the leak is from the valve body/cap or from the reinforcing fabric seam/joint surrounding the valve.

Once the inflatable boat has been fully inspected and the leaks identified hose-down the boat with fresh water and allow to dry thoroughly.

Carry out any tube fabric repairs using the correct fabric, solvent adhesive and/or replace/repair valves as necessary – see https://www.ribstore.co.uk/advice/advice-and-information

For repairs to inflatable dinghy floors/soles

Ensure that the inflatable dinghy is fully dry and lay the boat on a level table or trestles.

Turn the fully inflated dinghy upside down and sprinkle talcum powder over the base of the boat. Use a dry brush to spread the powder to ensure that the whole area is coated.

Turn the dinghy back over and carefully pour about a litre of fresh water into the boat. Gently agitate the water inside the boat to ensure that all areas have been covered with the water, taking care not to allow water to spill down the side of the boat.

Carefully lift the boat and observe any 'wet patches' on the powdered area of the inflatable boat floor or sole indicating that a puncture is present. Mark the leak with a chinagraph pencil or waterproof marker.

Empty the remaining water from the inflatable dinghy and allow to dry thoroughly.

Carry out any puncture repairs using the correct fabric, solvent and adhesive – see https://www.ribstore.co.uk/advice/advice-and-information for help and advice on how to repair inflatables.